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## **CONSUMER ALERT**

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### **ATTORNEY GENERAL OFFERS SUGGESTIONS TO AVOID BUYING INTO WEIGHT LOSS SCAMS**

Now that the holiday season is over, many consumers may make losing weight one of their goals in the new year, but state officials suggest using caution before buying a product or service promising quick, dramatic results.

"This is the time of year when many people contemplate positive changes for the future and many consumers make weight loss a top priority," said Attorney General Cooper. "Tennesseans need to be aware that weight loss product advertisers may make deceptive and unsubstantiated claims."

Attorney General Cooper recommends the following tips to assist consumers in avoiding weight loss scams:

**\*Exaggerated Claims or Promises.** Be skeptical of weight loss programs and/or products that promise significant results with little or no effort with lures such as: "Lose weight without diet or exercise!" All healthy weight loss programs involve exercise and a sensible diet. There are no quick and easy solutions. Be wary of claims using words such as "scientific breakthrough" or "revolutionary" as there are no magic weight loss pills or formulas.

**\*Misleading Comparisons.** Many weight loss companies use so-called “success stories” to advertise their product, but what works for one person may not work for you. Avoid false claims such as “Everybody will lose weight!” There is simply no one-size-fits-all product guaranteed to work for everyone.

**\*Fast Results.** Think twice if an advertisement for a weight loss product claims you can “lose 30 pounds in 30 days!” It is not healthy to lose weight quickly and is rarely effective for a long period of time. Products or programs that promise fast weight loss are probably scams and could be dangerous. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) warns consumers to watch out for extravagant claims of rapid weight loss, especially with sensational “before and after” photographs, testimonials from “famous” doctors and footnotes in fine print revealing the truth that diet and exercise are required or that results are not typical.

**\*Pills & Supplements.** There are a number of weight loss pills and supplements currently on the market, but few are approved by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA). The products may be ineffective or cause negative side effects. It’s important to remember many so-called “herbal” or “natural” products are not necessarily healthy or deemed safe by the government.

In addition, consumers considering joining a health club should be aware all for profit health clubs are required to register with the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs and obtain a Certificate of Registration each year. Mary Clement, Director of the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs, offers the following tips when considering joining a health club:

- \*Make sure the health club you want to join is registered with the Division of Consumer Affairs.
- \*Call the Division of Consumer Affairs and the Better Business Bureau to ask if there have been complaints filed against the health club in which you are interested.
- \*Be aware you have three days to cancel a health club contract and receive a full refund of monies invested. *You are required to notify the health club by certified mail if you decide to cancel.*
- \*Avoid long term contracts. You are responsible for paying the entire cost of the full term membership, even if you decide to drop out after a few visits. See if the club offers a month-to-month contract or a trial membership period to give you time to determine if you really want to join.
- \*Any initial membership contract offer longer than three years is not permitted in Tennessee.
- \*Be certain everything discussed is written into the contract. Don't be pressured into signing a contract you have not read. Keep a copy of the contract and be alert when facing high pressure sales tactics. Make sure you know of any penalties associated with a canceled contract.

If you have a complaint against a company offering a weight loss product, a health club or any company engaging in deceptive and unfair business practices, contact the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs at (615) 741-4737, toll free (inside Tennessee) at 1-800-342-8385 or online at [www.state.tn.us/consumer](http://www.state.tn.us/consumer).

More detailed information is available at the Federal Trade Commission’s website on products with potentially misleading claims at: <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2007/01/weightloss.htm>